

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

June 2006



Northern Way Event, Durham (but who is saying what, to whom?)



I attended an overview of 'the Northern Way' and took part in the discussion about regional transport issues and the transport needs of the North East.

*But the picture (left, with event Chair Durham Cllr Linda Ebbotson and Gateshead Deputy Leader Ian Mearns) lends itself readily to a caption competition. So, a bottle of **House of Commons Whisky** for the funniest caption - entries to 19 Ravensworth Road, NE11 9AB or email davidclellandmp@aol.com.*

High Level Bridge Repairs

The **High Level Bridge** restoration project has been a labour of love for **Network Rail** - most of the cost of the work (an eye-watering £38m plus) actually has little to do with running a railway. Despite mounting difficulties Network Rail, to its eternal credit, decided to keep the bridge open for road and pedestrian usage as well as rail. Time has taken its toll and each repair revealed new faults. Hence the length of time that the job is taking. The bridge is now expected to be re-opened to pedestrians and road transport in 2008.



Gateshead Stadium

As Chair of Gateshead's Recreation Committee I presented many a medal to athletes like Steve Cram and Seb Coe. I later ended up sparring with Seb Coe when we were opposing Whip's in the

Commons. So, Politics aside, it was nice to welcome him back to Gateshead to open the new facilities that will help produce Olympic athletes from our own region. (pictured left with Steve Cram and Seb Coe)



Gateshead Warm Zone



I was glad to be present when the **Gateshead Warm Zone** launched the careers of its 13 new employees, recruited with the help of European Social Funding money, to help Gateshead residents insulate their homes against the cold. Too many people have to endure the misery of cold homes and I have fought for years for funding to bring homes up to reasonable standards. This team know their business - they not only advise people on how to make their homes warmer but also help vulnerable people on low incomes get central heating, draught and loft insulation. Now is the time to get the work done and the team are will be working throughout Gateshead over the summer months.

Comment

If ever a Minister inherited a poisoned chalice, it has to be John Reid. The **Home Office** lurches from crisis to crisis with foreign offender deportations (or lack of), an unknown number of illegal immigrants in the UK and offenders absconding from prison.

No one has simple answers. But the Home Office is too big and needs to be broken up. Asylum, immigration and nationality need a separate department. Week after week, I see asylum seekers at my surgeries whose applications were refused two, three even five years ago. Because they have not been removed they live in false hope, often destitute without financial support or accommodation.

Illegal immigration is a global phenomenon affecting rich countries and poor alike; by definition, the numbers are hard to discover but the UK's estimated share of 'illegals' is actually relatively low contrary to tabloid imagination.

Perhaps we need to think laterally - a dogged determination to cling to a Convention drawn up more than 50 years ago, for a very different world, is perhaps no longer appropriate. *For the future, we have to improve entry controls and population registration. For the present - perhaps some sort of amnesty?*

At last, some good news tentatively emerging from **Iraq**, with the formation for the first time of a government of national unity, with the democratic credibility that comes from being directly elected by millions of Iraqi people. The Iraq security forces are increasingly taking the lead and we must do what we can to help the government with security and prosperity, and freedom for all Iraqi people. Then our troops can come home.

Here at home though, there is some serious work to do following the analysis of the **local election results**. This idea that we need to

be in a permanent state of change in order to maintain support is in need of a rethink. *Yet another Local Government White Paper is emerging*. Tony Blair has been the most successful Labour Leader ever - if success can be measured by length of office alone - and much has been achieved, but his announcement that he would not seek re-election has left a state of uncertainty that is at the heart of our present difficulties and needs to be clarified soon.

This report probably marks the last meeting of the **Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party**. Soon new constituencies will be formed and will select their Parliamentary representatives. *I have been privileged to represent the people of Tyne Bridge for the bulk of its existence and hope that I have performed my duties and responsibilities well enough to deserve the support of colleagues to continue to represent our communities in Parliament.*



Parliament

Talking of poison chalices. I have a lot of time for **Alan Johnson** but I had to disappoint him when we discussed the **Education and Inspections Bill**. While standards need to be further improved and schools that fail our young people cannot be tolerated, I continue to believe that this bill will not be of benefit to our youngsters and I could not support it when it came before the Commons last week. Choice is a fine word but such is the confusion that is now our education system, with LEA, Faith, Foundation, Academy, Specialist and now Trust schools, that a new breed of administrators has had to be invented - the 'choice advisers'. I cannot repeat it loudly enough "WHAT PARENTS WANT IS A GOOD LOCAL SCHOOL" the government was on the road to providing that so why this huge structural change?

Other Bills included the remaining stages of the **Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill**, the **Police and Justice Bill**, and consideration of the Lords' amendments to the **Civil Aviation Bill**. There were **Statements** on the findings of the inquiry into the **London bombings**, the **Basra incident**, **deportation and removals**, and **primary care Trusts and Ambulance Trusts**.

I led a delegation to see the Transport Minister to press the case for project **Orpheus**, an upgrade of Metro and Tyne and Wear public transport. I am also continuing to seek a resolution to the students fare issue.

I also had meetings with parliamentary colleagues about **House of Lords' reform**, representatives from the **Club and Institute Union**, and the **Passenger Transport Executive Group**.

There were meetings of the Transport Select Committee, Northern Group of Labour MPs and various ad-hoc meetings.



Constituency

In addition to the events on the front page, I also attended **Felling Ward's** social night - a cracking good 'do'. I attended Gateshead's **Annual Council meeting** and **Mayor's Reception** to pay my respects to **Cllr Joe Mitchinson**, who has been an excellent Mayor, and to congratulate **Cllr Maureen Goldsworthy** on her election, and wish her and husband Bob an enjoyable year of office.



(Above with council Leader Mick Henry, Alderman Albert Brooks and the Mayor)